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ABSTRACT

Approaches for serving culturally different handicapped children in the schools are considered. The importance of focusing on human diversity, beginning in the early grades, is emphasized. Teaching competencies needed to promote understanding and acceptance of such diversity are described, including skills in assessment, communication with parents, and appropriate teaching methods. Basic goals of programs serving culturally diverse children are listed, including the need to expand program content to reflect the cultural variety of the population, to acknowledge the historical exclusion of the culturally different, and to recognize qualities shared by various cultures as well as differences. An annotated list of approximately 25 culturally relevant curriculum materials is appended. (CL)

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Planning for a Culturally Sensitive Program

In the Preschool Setting

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Paper presented at the Council for Exceptional Children's 61st Annual International Convention, April 4, 1983, Detroit, Michigan.

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Current special education programmatic efforts are directed towards enabling children to develop to the optimum of their capacity. For children from different cultures, this goal can only be achieved by developing and implementing programs that recognize and reflect their cultural heritage and the expectations of performance within their cultural group. It is important that children be afforded an individualized education which not only has a developmental basis, but also has significant regard for their cultural expectations (Harvey, 1971). Consequently, more consideration must be given to the status and future of ethnicity within all aspects of the special education planning and placement process. Because of the changing nature of American society, this cultural sensitivity is an important objective for special education program.

Children and families of today are members of a complex world society that has a wealth of human diversity. Children of diverse backgrounds are more frequently coming into contact. Larger numbers of persons are joining our nation as political and/or economic refugees, immigrants, or illegal aliens from other countries. More mothers are entering the work force; simultaneously, our American society continues to be mobile. When children from these culturally different families join groups of other children, whether in day care centers, day care homes or schools, they bring with them the accepted ways of doing things in their families.

In addition, the reality of diversity in sex, age, and handicap is more immediately apparent as these groups demand access to "least restrictive environments." Consequently, classrooms of today are potent matrixes of human diversity and can no longer be used to present children with a monocultural view regarding society. Schools must directly and actively prepare children to accept and affirm human diversity in race, class, sex, handicap, and age.

Planning, executing and monitoring individualized educational plans are specific areas where cultural diversity must be considered. In this process, cultural sensitivity must be reflected as educators interface with children, their families, and with other professionals. The necessity of this is being confirmed as our legislative and court systems establish that handicaps, dialect, and linguistic differences must be considered as educators plan programs to accommodate groups of children.

Educators must aid children in expanding their realm of awareness and concern beyond their immediate environment in order to increase their potential for positive relationships among groups of people. Effort must be directed towards fostering the acquisition of basic skills necessary for living in a multicultural society. Such skills include academic, personal, interpersonal, communicative, and

economic proficiencies. Children must be provided the concepts and experiences which are necessary to assist them in realizing the extent of the similarities, and nature of the differences in their various human associations. In this manner, children are encouraged to develop an understanding and appreciation of human diversity.

Schools can serve an important role in the process of assuring optimal educational and related services to culturally different handicapped children. Classrooms can typically provide a valuable resource for fostering acceptance of, and teaching about human diversity. Such instructions must begin during the early years and continue throughout all children's school experience. As such, these instructions can be an active and viable part of the school curriculum. By concretely experiencing many different ways of doing things, all children become acclimated and receptive to cultural and other human variations. Continual educational efforts must be devoted towards expanding children's awareness of others, their capacity to communicate and cooperate, and their sense of social responsibility. Through this process children can acquire more flexible expectations of human behavior which permits more respectful and open minded attitudes in contacts with less familiar people.

To implement these goals, teachers must be provided with competencies which facilitate the establishment of educational environments that are supportive of multicultural interactions. Rueda, Rodriguez, and Drieto (1981) conducted a survey of 77 public school teachers serving bilingual/multicultural exceptional children. At least 86% of the respondents were white, and the remainder of the respondents represented different minority groups. The purpose of the survey was to identify those competencies which were considered of importance by practitioner in working with handicapped children from minority groups.

The results indicated that competencies deemed most important included skills in assessment, teaching methods, and parent involvement. Significantly, familiarity with language, defining the bilingual/multicultural handicapped child, and examining the cultural background were considered by the respondents to be of somewhat lesser importance. One reason for such results may be attributed to the larger number of respondents who were white. Traditionally, this cultural group has placed decreased importance on the issue of cultural sensitivity within the curriculum.

It is of critical value to the instructional process that educational emphasis include assisting students to acquire and/or expand the knowledge, understandings and skills that are necessary to function to their optimal capacity in our technologically complex society. However, it is of equal value for education programs to

accomplish this objective through curriculums which reflect a recognition and respect for the cultural heritage of the children. It is important for schools to commit themselves to these dual goals.

Schools must then play a vital role in encouraging cultural sensitivity and in promoting the recognition of the values, standards, and worth of all cultures. These objectives can be achieved by acknowledging the uniquenesses and strengths of children of different backgrounds and/or languages and by reflecting the richness of their heritage into all aspects of the instructional process. Developing an understanding of the values and cultures of the children, and active involvement of the families in the school program are vehicles through which such goals can best be accomplished.

In order for children to acquire an understanding of their own background and of the many other groups which compose our society, there are several basic goals which programs should address. According to Cooper (1981), these include:

1. the need to know, understand and accept the different lifestyles of the children and their families. Programs must become knowledgeable of the cultural values and perspectives of the children they serve. This knowledge should then be utilized to develop appropriate strategies for achieving program goals. Only with knowledge and understanding will professionals become sensitive to the "real" needs of culturally different children. When professionals who are aware of these special needs guide a child's development, there is less risk that home expectations and school expectations will differ.
2. the need to acknowledge whites from low socio-economic backgrounds as culturally different. This group has almost become an "invisible minority." We must, however, realize that their cultural pattern are different from and often strongly opposed by middle-class white Americans.
3. the need to expand program content to reflect the cultural variety of the population. The content of the programs can easily reflect the cultures and perspectives of all the students and families involved. The goal of this effort would be to help children understand that there are many lifestyles, languages, and points of view. By developing such programs, we can enhance the ability to function in our culturally diverse society.
4. the need for training in "cultural diversity." Teachers and other professionals need to receive preservice and inservice training on the differences between cultures. Such training will help eliminate many of the fears that often accompany cultural ignorance. This goal can be accomplished by utilizing any

available opportunity to present accurate descriptions of culturally different children and their families. An example of such an effort might include planning an ethnic night at parent meetings or school assemblies and allowing families to dress in their native costumes while describe their cultures.

5. the need to acknowledge the "historical" exclusion of the culturally different. This exclusion occurred on political, economic, and social fronts. Knowledge of history can sometimes keep a society from repeating mistakes.
6. the need for more understanding of the impact of the public on personal attitudes. Teachers and other professionals must understand that public attitudes have an impact on their relationship with minority children. For example, a few American psychologists contend that blacks and other minorities achieve below whites because of genetic inferiority. Barnes (1971) discussed the importance of not ignoring this group of professionals because of their potential influence on those at powerful policy-making levels.
7. the need to allow (and sometimes help) the minority child to find him/herself. Culturally different children often struggle with maintaining their own cultural identity.
8. the need to recognize the qualities held in common by various cultures and the differences which separate one culture from others. Children's cultural and ethnic identity can be incorporated into stories; art projects; and discussions about families, homes, likes and dislikes, as well as other related topics. When there is understanding of the ways cultures are alike, the differences are often easier to address.
9. the need for ongoing assessment. As is the case with all children, assessment with culturally children should be broadly based and continuous.
10. the need to involve parents in educating their children. While important for all programs, parent involvement is especially critical in programs serving children of many cultures. Parents of culturally diverse children bring different values and perspectives to programs. Opportunities should be available to utilize their involvement not only to help specific children by tailoring assistance to their family background, but also to facilitiate communication between home and school.

A respect and appreciation for cultural differences can be engendered within programs by directing consideration to each of the above tenents. Further, attention to

cultural diversity can assist children in avoiding ethnocentric and prejudicial attitudes, and increase their potential for positive relationships among groups of people.

In summary, individualizing educational programs for culturally different children requires that schools must actively:

1. Become knowledgeable of the cultural values and perspectives of the children and families served.
2. Use that knowledge to develop appropriate strategies for achieving the goals of the curriculum.
3. Develop programs to enhance the ability of our students to function in their environment.
4. Use "cultural diversity" as one criteria for selecting and modifying the instructional process.

The instructional planning process guides educators in determining what should be taught, in what sequence, and how long. Teachers, administrators must then use creativity and imagination in deciding materials, techniques, and other resources to use within the instructional process. Although there are some restrictions in terms of the content of instructional programs, the effective use of imagination and creativity can make that content chosen meaningful and valuable. Supplementary printed material, media and other teaching aids are important resources to use in developing culturally appropriate educational programs for young handicapped children. This article concludes with an annotated list of supplemental and complementary culturally relevant curriculum materials.

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Rueda, R., Rodriguez, R., and Prieto, A. Teachers' Perceptions of Competencies for Instructing Bilingual/Multicultural Exceptional Children. Exceptional Children. 48 (November 1981), 268-270.

Resources

African Culture Series. Detroit, Michigan: Children's Museum Detroit Public Schools, 1970.

A portfolios of materials containing illustrations and information on native artifacts, architecture, musical instruments, and costumes used in the different countries of Africa.

Bailey, R. The Appalachian Experience: A Community Workers' Guide. Greensboro, North Carolina: A CABLE Publication, 1979.

Describes the cultural heritage and family strengths of the people of Appalachia. Instructional stragegies, techniques, and resources for cultivating an awareness and appreciation of the mountain culture are also included.

Black Children Just Keep On Growing: Alternative Curriculum Models for Young Black Children. Washington, D.C.: The Black Child Development Institute, 1973.

A review and analysis of specific questions about education as it relates to Black children. Descriptive narratives of selected Black child development program models are included. Other articles are: "Labeling Black Children," "Self-development

and Black children," etc.

Calendar of Black Children. Washington, D.C.: The Black Child Development Institute, 1983.

A monthly chronicle of historical cultural highlights in the heritage of Black Americans.

The Child and His/Her Environment: A special Focus Issue of the Exploring the Black Experience Series. Greensboro, North Carolina: Center for Action Based Leadership Experiences Publications, 1981.

Activities, procedures and resources for planning instructional activities related to the Black culture are suggested. Also included is a poster, "Exploring the Black Experience," which features monthly techniques for developing a learning environment which reflects a sensitivity to the culture of Black Americans.

Cooper, J. Planning for a Culturally Sensitive Program. TAD script number 3. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Technical Assistance Development System, 1981.

Contains a review of approaches to working with culturally diverse children, guidelines for ensuring that individualized services for children take into account cultural background; discussion of curricular approaches for special needs children and ways to modify curriculums to meet the needs of culturally diverse children; and description of several programs which includes children from different cultures.

Curriculum Approaches from a Black Perspective. Washington, D.C.: The Black Child Development Institute, 1973.

Describes the proceedings of a curriculum model laboratory session. Topics include: theoretical information on black education; and examples of programs and activities which reflect the cultural experiences of Black Americans.

Detroit Objective Referenced Test (DORT) Ethnic Literacy Handbook: A Guide for Teacher Planning. Detroit, Michigan: The Board of Education of the City of Detroit, 1980.

Materials and activities are described which both complements the reading system, and develops a respectful appreciation for different cultures. Includes instructional activities on ethnicity, the holocaust, immigration, family life, folk tales, and nutrition; information and activities on the cultural heritage of

American Indians, Black American, Chinese and Japanese, and Hispanic groups; an annotated bibliography of children's books using ethnic characters; as well as a listing of ethnic films and organization. Other books available are: a teacher's manual; and ethnic literacy guides on "The Mexican," and "The Arabs."

Duran, D. Latino Materials: A Multimedia Guide for Children and Young Adults. New York: Neal Schuman, Pub., 1979.

Annotated collection of books and films which can be used by programs for Latino children and young adults. Includes general information on the history of the Latino literary movement; guidelines for library services to Latino groups; a glossary of important Latino words; and a directory of publishers and distributors of Latino resource materials.

Epstein, N. Language, Ethnicity and the Schools: Policy Alternatives for Bilingual-Bicultural Education. Washington, D.C.: The Institute for Educational Leadership, 1977.

A non-technical exploration of the basic rationale, legal and research status, and policy alternatives regarding the issue of bilingual-bicultural education.

Gaines, L. Building a Pan-African Preschool. Brooklyn, New York: East Publishers, 1973.

Discusses the role of the public school in our society and the effects of this system on Black Americans. Includes activities for incorporating aspects of Black culture into the curriculum.

Hansen - Krening, N. Competency and Creativity in Language Arts: A Multiethnic Focus. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979.

A resource text for teachers interested in using multicultural materials in teaching basic language arts skills. Illustrations are provided of ways in which artistic contributions from different cultural groups can be integrated into music, art, drama, movement and literature lessons.

Hicks, J. Serving Preschool Handicapped Children of Various Cultures: An Annotated Bibliography. TAD script number 6. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Technical Assistance Development System, 1982.

An annotated bibliography containing information on: special education and cultural diversity; the preschool handicapped child of a different culture; and national organizations which are resources on culturally specific issues.

Jackson, E. (Ed.) The Young Black Exceptional Child: Providing Programs and Services. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Technical Assistance Development, undated.

A discussion of the issues surrounding services to Black handicapped children. Information provided present alternatives for intervening with Black children and their families; strategies useful for Black professionals in leadership roles; and a synthesis of the knowledge currently being employed in addressing issues related to Black exceptional children and their families.

Jackson, E. & Karp, J. (Eds.) Program Strategies for Cultural Diversity: Proceedings of the 1980 Minority Leadership Workshop: Handicapped Children's Early Education Program. Seattle, Washington: Western States Technical Assistance Resource, 1980.

Describes the proceedings of the HCEEP Minority Leadership Workshop. Topics discussed include: "Cultural Awareness: Working with Parents of Handicapped Children," "Developing, Implementing, and Disseminating the Educational Model," "Trends in Cultural Pluralism and Assessment of Minority Group Children," etc.

Johnson, R., Brown, C., Harris, A., & Lewis, E. Manual of Black Parenting Education. St. Louis, Missouri: Institute of Black Studies, 1980.

Provides information for individuals who work with Black families to aid in developing culturally sensitive parent education programs. Discusses the role of the Black family in Black child development; the Black family as an economic unit; and community resources for Black child development.

Kamp, S. & Chinn, P. A Multiethnic Curriculum for Special Education Students. Reston, Virginia: The Council for Exceptional Children, 1982.

Presents a curriculum which is designed to help students to better understand and appreciate ethnic differences. Sample lessons are provided that integrate the experiences of American Indians, Asian Americans, Black Americans, Mexican Americans, and Puerto Rican cultural groups.

Landurand, P., Gillespie - Silver, P., and Pirie, L., (Eds.) Issues in Multicultural Special Education: a series of position papers. Weston, Massachusetts: Regis College, Multicultural Institute for Change, 1982.

A series of position papers developed to improve the quality of services to linguistically and culturally different children. Topics include: "The Multicultural Institute for Change," "Multicultural Awareness," "Cultural Identity," "Language in a Social Context," "Educating Linguistically Different Children with Special Needs," "Games and Exercises in Multicultural Awareness," etc.

McNeil, E., Allen, J., Schmidt, V. and Brierton, B. Cultural Awareness for Young Children. rev. ed. Dallas, Texas: The Learning Tree, 1981.

Describes the philosophy and instructional program of the Learning Tree--a school designed to develop cultural awareness in young children. Includes information; games; activities; and an annotated resource of books for children and adults on the Asian, Black, Cowboy, Eskimo, Mexican, and Native American cultures. Also contains an annotated listing of general multicultural resource books.

Montero, M. (Ed.) Bilingual Education Teacher Handbook: Strategies for the design of Mulitcultural curriculum. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Evaluation, Dissemination and Assessment Center, 1981.

Provides a framework for adapting, rejecting and reformulating presently used materials into teacher-into material for bilingual/multicultural curriculum. Describes theoretical information on bilingual education; sample lesson plans; and a materials evaluation checklist for determining the cultural appropriateness of materials.

Plata, M. Assessment, Placement and Programming of Bilingual Exceptional Children: a Practical Approach. Reston, Virginia: ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children, 1982.

Discusses the issue of assessing bilingual exceptional children. Also includes practical suggestions for assessment; general information for program development; and an example of an instrument to measure oral language proficiency.

Schmidt, V. and McNeil, E. Cultural Awareness: A Resource Bibliography. Washington, D.C.: The National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1979.

An annotated listing of children and adult resources and materials on Asian Americans, Black Americans, and Spanish Speaking Americans; multicultural print and audio visual materials: and a resource directory of relevant agencies and organizations.

Schmidt, N., Twerefoo, G., Kamanda, D., and Kennedy J. Resources for Teaching Children About Africa. Urbana, Illinois: ERIC Clearinghouse on Early Childhood Education, 1976.

Describes instructional materials for teaching children about Africa. Many of the books included in the bibliography are dated. However, the description of "African Games for American Children contains relevant information.